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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended to help school districts and individual schools design and implement outcomes-based accountability systems that include students with disabilities. Part 1 provides an overview of issues that must be considered in developing such a system. Part 2 suggests implementation options and strategies and likely implications of these options for students, parents, school personnel, district administrators, and boards of education. The guide is organized around four critical sets of decisions that must be made: (1) select outcomes for all educational programs; (2) establish performance standards; (3) identify assessment strategies; and (4) identify accountable parties. For each of these issues a corresponding set of options is presented. The discussion of each option is in terms of assumptions, strategies to consider, and implications. A final section offers guidelines for putting outcomes-based accountability into practice. (DB)

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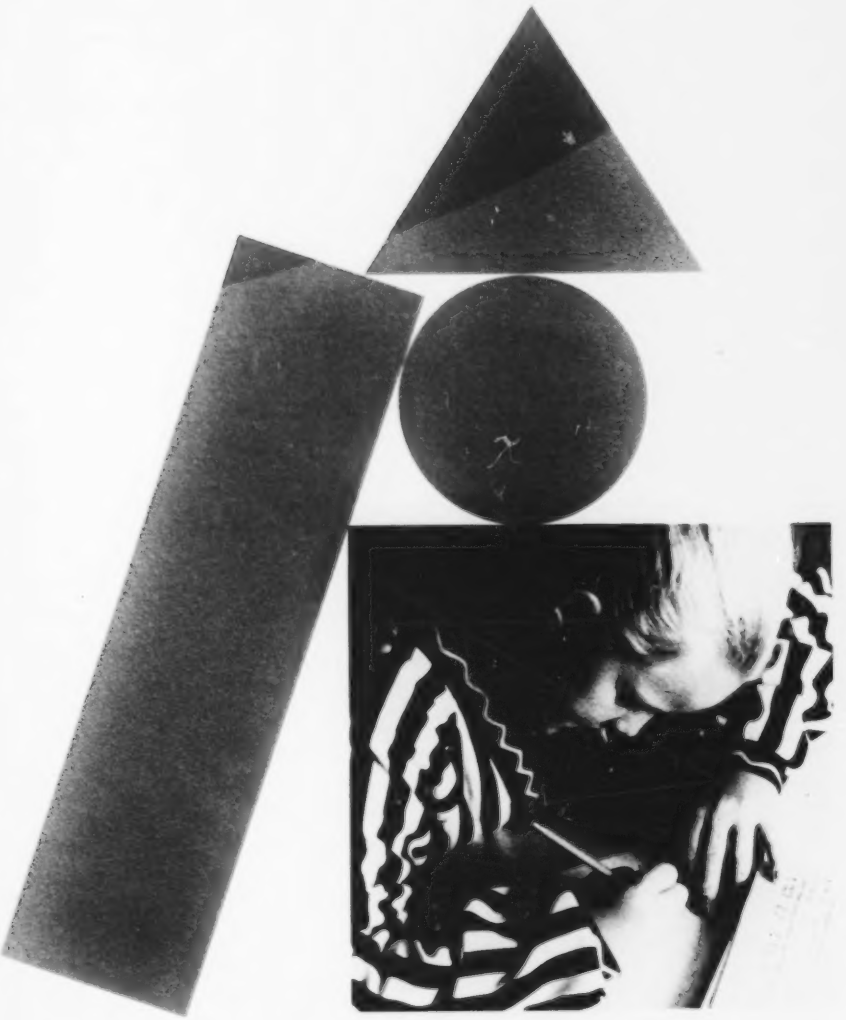
ISSUES & OPTIONS

In Outcomes-Based Accountability for Students with Disabilities

This document addresses many issues that often are overlooked when school districts are developing policies for students with disabilities.



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ISSUES & OPTIONS

IN OUTCOMES-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY
FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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The Center for Policy Options in Special Education was funded by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education (Contract #HS 90-0500.01) to provide an opportunity for leaders in regular and special education to jointly address pressing policy issues facing special education within the context of educational restructuring. The goals of the Center are to foster communication between regular and special educators through the identification of options for state and local policymakers to consider in three areas: school-site restructuring, outcomes-based accountability, and services for students with severe emotional and behavior disorders.

The Center is based at the University of Maryland at College Park and is a collaborative effort with Westat, Inc. Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent the official agency positions of the U.S. Department of Education.

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Preface

"High performance is no longer considered an exception; exceptional performance is expected to become the norm."
National Education Goals Panel

The aim of this document is to improve the educational outcomes for **all** children. The document will provide a framework for creating an outcomes-based accountability system that includes students with disabilities.

This document was developed with input and advice from state and district administrators, principals and teachers, university researchers and teacher educators, parents, advocates, and national policymakers. Its purpose is to create awareness of the issues related to including students with disabilities in outcomes-based accountability systems and to provide options for implementing such systems.

The issues and options are presented according to four critical sets of decisions that must be made in the creation of an outcomes-based accountability system:

1. Select outcomes for all educational programs;
2. Establish performance standards;
3. Identify assessment strategies; and
4. Identify accountable parties.

You will find that the issues and options are parallel; for each issue, a corresponding set of options is presented. The issues are interrelated, as are the options for addressing them. The option selected to address one issue is likely to influence the selection of other options. We recommend that readers review the definitions and assumptions presented in the introduction that follows; they are important for understanding our conceptual approach to outcomes-based accountability.

Note that following the options, we present a set of steps necessary to put an outcomes-based accountability system into practice; these steps will be necessary no matter which choices are made on the options.

Who Might Use this Document?

This document is intended for use at the district and school levels. Local boards of education and superintendents, local district administrators, principals, school personnel, and community stakeholders will find the document useful as they design and implement outcomes-based accountability systems. Part I provides an overview of issues that must be considered in developing outcomes-based accountability systems that include students with disabilities. Part II suggests options and strategies for implementing these systems and the likely implications of these options for students, parents, school personnel, district administrators, and boards of education.

The National Center on Educational Outcomes, a collaborative effort of the University of Minnesota, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, and St. Cloud State University, has produced a companion guide to this document entitled *Self-Study Guide to the Development of Educational Outcomes and Indicators*. This guide provides a step-by-step process for developing a system of outcomes and indicators to assess educational outcomes. A list of publications available from the National Center on Educational Outcomes is presented at the end of this document.

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INTRODUCTION

American educators and policymakers have become proponents of accountability systems that emphasize better results for students. This commitment broadly embraces all youngsters. Many current accountability systems focus on students without regard to their special learning characteristics. As a result, educators and policymakers now need additional information on how to address students with highly diverse and challenging instructional needs. How will we ensure that schools are accomplishing desirable outcomes for these students? How can we ensure that our systems of accountability work fairly and positively to address a diverse population of students?

This document attempts to respond to this need for information by providing educators and policymakers in schools and school districts with a series of issues and policy options that surround outcomes-based accountability as it applies to students with diverse needs, particularly students with disabilities. We realize that students with disabilities are but one of several groups that contribute to the diversity of the nation's schools, including students with limited English proficiency, children of migrant farm workers, and educationally disadvantaged youth. In many respects, the issues and options should prove instructive to improving the overall sensitivity of our systems of accountability to **all** children.

How Was This Document Developed?

The Center for Policy Options in Special Education (hereafter referred to as the Center), under contract to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education, was created in October 1990. The Center was charged with identifying the issues and policies that were emerging in three areas: educational restructuring, outcomes-based accountability, and services for students with serious emotional disturbance. The first product of the Center, *Issues and Options in Restructuring Schools and Special Education Programs*, was published in September 1992. This document is the second, and a third on services for students with serious emotional disturbance will follow.

This document focuses on outcomes-based accountability at the local school and district level for a number of reasons. First, current reform efforts have largely occurred at this grass-roots level, with schools being made accountable for all students. Second, while states are charged with assuring a free, appropriate public education for students with disabilities, it falls on the shoulders of school district personnel to provide special education services and to implement procedures designed to assure compliance with federal and state laws and regulations regarding special education. Third, the National Center on Educational Outcomes, another OSEP-sponsored project, is examining outcome assessment systems at the state level and has produced a summary of current practices. (A list of current publications of the National Center on Educational Outcomes is included at the end of this document.)

The Center sought to bring together diverse groups of individuals representing both regular and special educators to provide expertise and perspective in the identification of policy issues and options. Initially, Center staff held a series of meetings and informal discussions with educators who were working to implement outcomes assessment and outcomes-based accountability systems. These meetings and discussions helped us to identify states and school districts that were creating outcomes-based accountability systems; site visits and telephone interviews were conducted with individuals in these states and districts. Center staff then sponsored several meetings to discuss critical issues and to identify promising practices and policies. The policy options were an outgrowth of these meetings.

What is Outcomes-Based Accountability?

The phrase *outcomes-based accountability* contains two key terms that require definition. First, *outcomes-based* emphasizes the central role of student outcomes in a system of accountability. In the past, accountability primarily emphasized compliance with procedures and practices perceived as important to student learning. Disappointment with educational results, however, has led many policymakers to conclude that focusing exclusively on the processes of schooling is misguided. Rather, student outcomes must be designated; standards of perfor-

mance need to be set; and student performance on the agreed-upon outcomes needs to be assessed.

The word accountability requires a working definition since many informed persons disagree about what it entails in practice. To put it simply, we define accountability as a systematic method to assure those inside and outside the educational system that schools and students are moving toward desired goals.

Outcomes-based accountability requires more than the assessment of outcomes. It also requires that student performance on the agreed-upon outcomes is routinely reported and that consequences follow. Accountability systems commonly have two major approaches to consequences that are not necessarily mutually exclusive: (1) those that involve the automatic imposition of sanctions or rewards and (2) those that rely on the public disclosure of results to have a consequence. Rewards and sanctions can take a number of forms. Their variations are due to differences in the reward or sanction itself and in the recipient of the reward or sanction, that is, the accountable party. In most cases, reward- and sanction-based models of accountability are clearly specified; these models often allow little, if any, discretion about whether the reward or sanction should be imposed. Consequences may take longer to be realized in a school or district when public disclosure systems are used. Two common types of public disclosure systems are consumer choice and report card systems. These systems publicize and/or compare the reported outcomes of schools and districts; then parents, school boards, and others may act on the reported information if they choose. See Table 1 for a description of some of the common types of outcomes-based accountability systems.

Three important assumptions shape the issues and options that follow. *First*, the implicit goal of outcomes-based accountability systems is to improve aggregate student performance including the performance of students with disabilities. The goals of accountability systems are frequently stated in terms of improving instructional practice, reporting to the public/community on an aggregate level of school performance, making the notion more competitive economically, or focusing greater attention on the results of education. Underlying each of these goals, however, is the desire to improve student performance at the school, district, or state level. While individual student performance will need to improve for this goal to be reached, individual student accountability (i.e., procedures to improve the outcomes of each individual student) may not be an explicit goal of an outcomes-based accountability system. Rather, the system may measure student progress in the aggregate to gauge district or school progress.

TABLE 1: Examples of Outcomes-Based Accountability Systems

Basic Approach	Variant	Core Mechanism
Reward- and Sanction-Based Incentive Systems	Monetary Awards/Losses to Schools	Funding decisions tied to results obtained by school.
	Assignment of Corrective Action Status and Technical Assistance	Failure to obtain desired level of outcomes invokes external assistance team to help place school on track to improvement.
	Waivers and Regulatory Flexibility	Schools and district that achieve specified outcome levels are granted waivers from certain state requirements.
	School or District Closure/Takeover	Sustained failure to achieve outcomes involves decision to replace officials in charge or to close the school or district.
	Warranties	Failure to equip students with required competencies makes school district responsible for retraining to specified level of competence.
	Accreditation	At regular intervals, outside teams of experts or peers assess schools' and districts' performance on outcomes, usually in combination with their use of procedures and practices associated with quality education.
	Monetary Awards to Teachers	Students' performance is a factor in teachers' salary determinations or the award of bonuses to staff members.
	Graduation and Postschool Opportunities Tied to Students' School Performance	Students' high school diplomas, postsecondary financial aid, and college admission are linked to test performance; employers agree to hire based on students' performance in school.
Public Disclosure Systems	School- or District-level Report Cards	Official publication of schools' and districts' performance on various outcome indicators. Explicit comparisons among schools and districts often included as an incentive to improve.
	Parental Choice of School or District for Child to Attend	Parents as consumers have access to information about schools' records of performance and overall reputation; information is used to allow parents to select a school that meets their requirements.

Second, the total education experience of students should be the focus of outcomes-based accountability systems. Educational reform has created new demands on schools that are resulting in new approaches to the content and delivery of services. The acquisition of social, life, and job skills, in addition to academics, is increasingly being viewed as critical for all students. Moreover, many students receive special services to help them acquire necessary skills; yet, the success of these services is rarely assessed. If outcomes-based accountability systems do not focus on the impact of all services received by students, critical information will be lost for evaluating student performance.

Third, the implementation of outcomes-based accountability systems at the local level occurs within the larger context of state and national accountability systems. Many states have designed accountability systems that require local school districts to implement testing programs and other indicators of student performance. These indicators are used to compare school districts within the state or to determine if students have mastered minimum competencies. Local outcomes-based accountability systems will need to be aligned with these state and national systems.

Why Do We Need Outcomes-Based Accountability for Students with Disabilities?

Readers may question the need for outcomes-based accountability for students with disabilities. Some educators believe that the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for students with disabilities already constitutes a suitable and separate "accountability system"; and within a model of accountability that emphasizes procedural compliance, IEPs may have proven suitable. However, special educators and local administrators now must consider outcomes-based accountability systems for several reasons.

The failure to hold schools accountable for the outcomes of students with disabilities is ill advised when evidence exists that students with disabilities are not reaching satisfactory levels on such outcomes as understanding basic math and science concepts, school completion, and employment. Without outcomes clearly in focus, students receiving special education services may be consigned to curricula that fail to include challenges they can meet.

Students with disabilities are inevitably affected by outcomes-based accountability in regular education. Most students with disabilities are exposed to the same curriculum as those without disabilities, or to a very similar one. Moreover, since most students receiving special education services spend more than half their school day with their nondisabled peers, the successes or failures of students with disabilities must be considered when outcomes are assessed and reported.

IEPs as currently designed are ineffective in assessing student outcomes at the level of the school or district; they often function primarily as compliance monitoring tools for the specially designed instruction an individual student will receive. Moreover, IEPs need to address only the specially designed portion of a student's program; if the student needs no accommodations or special assistance in some area, that portion of the student's program does not have to be covered in the IEP. Given the key role of IEPs in the service of students with disabilities, a restructured IEP (e.g., an IEP with progress reporting on accomplishment of the agreed-upon outcomes established for all students) might serve as an effective tool in an outcomes-based accountability system that includes students with disabilities.

The next part of this document sets out the key issues that must be considered, as outcomes-based accountability systems that include all students are created. These issues relate to four critical sets of decisions that must be made:

- Select outcomes for all educational programs;
- Establish performance standards;
- Identify assessment strategies; and
- Identify accountable parties.

The second part presents policy options related to these sets of decisions; each option is presented with suggested implementation strategies and likely implications.

A Final Introductory Note

The following presentation of issues and options is not meant to imply that the process of creating an outcomes-based accountability system that includes students

with disabilities will be a quick and easy one. The issues are complex, and the choices to be made will be difficult. The options selected will be tied to the overall goals and mission of the school and/or district, and a significant commitment of time and resources will be needed to implement the system. Most important, continuing communication will be needed among all members of the educational community to assure that the results of the system are translated into improvements in instructional practice to improve student outcomes.

As reviewers read our draft documents, they had several concerns and questions; some reviewers hoped this document would provide answers to a wide range of questions concerning outcomes-based accountability. This document responds to some of the reviewers' concerns and questions, but several of these were outside the original purpose of this document. To prevent any misconceptions concerning the issues and options to follow, this document does not attempt to: (1) provide a model for selecting outcomes (see the National Center on Educational Outcomes, *Self-Study Guide to the Development of Educational Outcomes and Indicators*); (2) describe how to develop a curriculum framework based on agreed-upon outcomes; (3) provide mechanisms for ensuring individual student outcomes; or (4) advocate the use of a specific model of outcomes-based education (obe).

Part I: The Issues

Discussions with policymakers and practitioners, concerning the participation of students with disabilities in outcomes-based accountability systems, identified four critical sets of decisions that must be addressed by districts and schools in designing an outcomes-based accountability system:

1. Select outcomes for all educational programs;
2. Establish performance standards;
3. Identify assessment strategies; and
4. Identify accountable parties.

These critical sets of decisions are interrelated. Selection of outcomes will affect the assessments used to measure student performance. Although not addressed here, curriculum and instruction must be inextricably linked to the outcomes. Educators cannot be held accountable for student performance unless students are taught a curriculum derived from the selected outcomes. Performance standards are used to determine student mastery of the outcomes. In designing each aspect of the system, consideration must be given to the implications for students with disabilities to ensure that their unique needs are accommodated.

The following pages enumerate a series of issues and considerations for each set of decisions to be made. They are meant to assist local administrators in making decisions as they design and implement outcomes-based accountability systems. While the discussion highlights the relevance for students with disabilities, it is applicable to all students.

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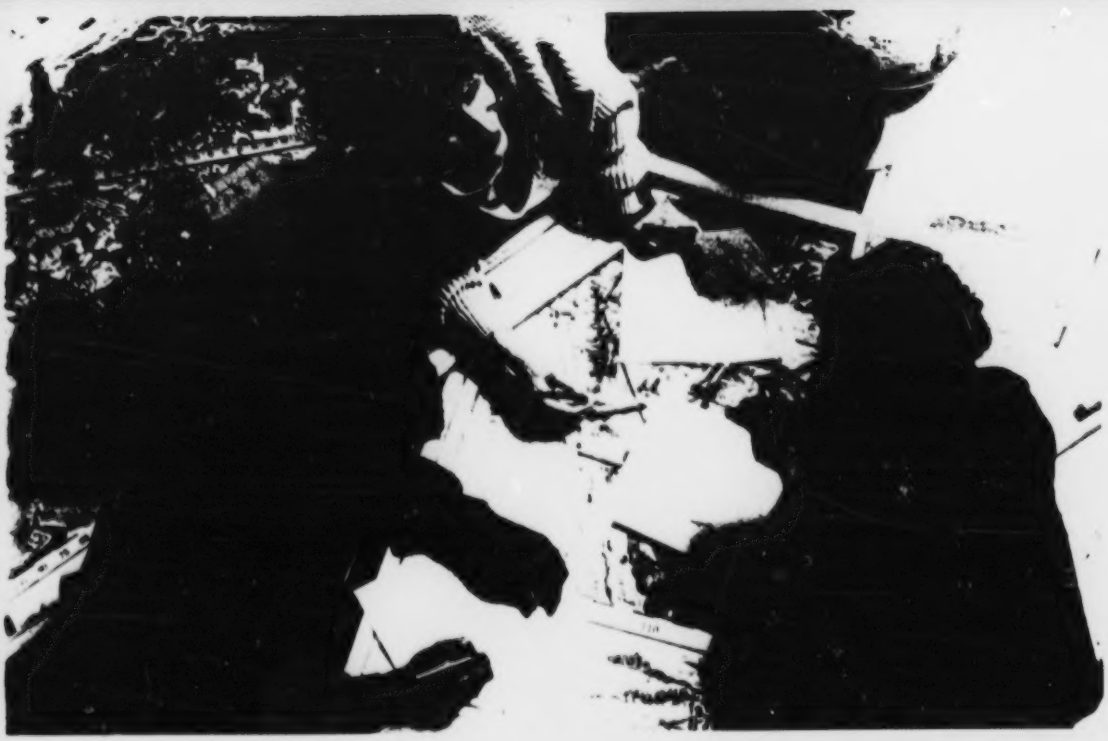

ISSUE 1: SELECT OUTCOMES FOR ALL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

What are the desired outcomes of education for all children? Should there be modified outcomes for students with disabilities?

The selection of outcomes requires agreement on both the long-term and short-term goals of instruction and alignment of the curriculum with established goals and objectives; that is, the selection should be driven by the district's and/or school's vision or mission of education. Reaching consensus on the desired outcomes can be a challenging process that involves many different parties, such as students, educators, administrators, parents, business leaders, and community members. If all students are to benefit from the establishment of outcomes, stakeholders representing all students, including those with disabilities, must be included in selecting the outcomes.

Historically, the success of special education services has been measured by examining input and process standards, with a focus on compliance with rules and regulations. More recently, the expected outcomes of students with disabilities have been emphasized to determine the extent to which instruction provides benefits to students both in school and throughout their lives.

Outcomes for students with disabilities traditionally have been defined and measured individually, according to long-term goals and short-term objectives specified on the students' IEPs. In the aggregate, special education outcomes have been examined in terms of postschool measures, such as gainful employment and enrollment in postsecondary schooling. Conversely, regular education outcomes have focused on in-school measures such as achievement and attendance. Special education services typically address more global aspects of a student's life than does regular education, such as the domains of home, school, work, and community, as well as leisure and recreational skills. Recent efforts to increase collaboration between regular and special education will necessitate that special and regular educators work toward consensus on defining appropriate outcomes and content standards (i.e., what is to be taught) for all students.

1 **Outcomes that can accommodate the diverse capabilities and needs of all students, including students with disabilities, need to be defined and agreed upon.**

- **Many students with disabilities can be expected** to accomplish many of the same **outcomes established for their nondisabled peers.** However, trying to retrofit regular **education outcomes for all students with disabilities** is unlikely to succeed.
- **Changing societal demands require weighing the** inclusion of both academic and **nonacademic outcomes in an outcomes-based** accountability system. Nonacademic outcomes might include independent living skills, postschool employment, or postsecondary schooling.
- Educators may be reluctant to establish broad outcomes that encompass nonacademic domains such as independent living or postschool employment, because they perceive themselves as having little control over postschool services and opportunities. However, if schools are to be held accountable for preparing **all** students for an active role in society, students with disabilities must be included in the system.
- One barrier to the inclusion of students with disabilities in outcomes-based accountability systems is the individualized nature of special education services. The high priority placed on meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities may appear to be at odds with defining group outcomes. Individual student goals and objectives can be used, however, to assure that students meet the agreed-upon outcomes, provided the outcomes are not narrowly defined.

2 **All stakeholders need to reach consensus on the outcomes that are desirable for all students.**

- Desired outcomes of the system must be selected with wide community participation and input (administrators, regular and special educators, support staff, and business and community members). Parents and students themselves are also key stakeholders in the selection of outcomes; their buy-in is essential to the success of the outcomes-based accountability system.
- Historically, special educators have been infrequently included in decision making for all students. Their input is critical to ensuring that students with disabilities are considered and that their special needs are represented in the outcomes-based accountability process. The consensus-building process used to select outcomes can foster dialogue between special and regular educators about the purposes and expectations of the educational system and how special education services can support the district's goals and mission.
- Students with disabilities receive services from a range of disciplines (e.g., health, medicine, social work) in addition to education. These disciplines need to be involved in the selection of outcomes. As schools become the focal point for delivering a wider range of services to all students, a wider group of professionals will have an impact on the accomplishment of the agreed-upon outcomes.

3 **Curriculum and instructional inputs need to be aligned with the agreed-upon outcomes. This includes specially designed instruction provided to students with disabilities.**

- Many students with disabilities have the same curricular and instructional needs as their nondisabled peers, although some of these students require a modification of the learning environment. Specially designed instruction for students with disabilities needs to be aligned with the curriculum to assist these students in meeting the agreed-upon outcomes.
- Students with more significant disabilities often receive educational services that are very different from those received by nondisabled students. Stakeholders must determine how the curricula of those students will be aligned with the agreed-upon outcomes.

4 **The relationship between IEP goals and objectives and the agreed-upon outcomes needs to be defined.**

- IEPs focus only on specially designed instruction and do not necessarily reflect any other part of the curriculum delivered to students.
- Some IEP goals and objectives may not be directly related to the curriculum based on the agreed-upon outcomes.
- The individual needs of students will determine the relationships between IEP goals and objectives and the agreed-upon outcomes.

"We must shift to a results-based system and those results should be our ultimate measure of compliance."

Local special education administrator

ISSUE 2: ESTABLISH PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

What level of student performance will be required of all students? Will different performance standards be used for some students?

Performance standards are benchmarks against which student performance on assessments may be compared; they set the expectations for student performance on the agreed-upon outcomes. Outcomes-based accountability systems usually compare school or district performance to an absolute standard or to a comparison group (for example, a national or state average) at one point, or they may portray change in school or district outcomes over time. This is essentially a choice of comparison groups; that is, are schools or districts compared to themselves to determine change in their performance over time, or are they compared to a fixed standard of performance? Likewise, standards must be set for student performance—that is, the level of mastery students must obtain to determine if the outcome has been met.

Fixed standards seek to promote high standards for all students, including those groups—such as students with disabilities—for whom performance expectations are often low. If the accountability system is based on high fixed standards for all students, schools and districts will be held accountable for bringing all students to a high level of mastery. Such a system cannot easily accommodate differences in student ability and characteristics, however, nor can it capture past educational achievements, family background, and so forth. Measures of gain assess the effect of schools and teachers on the performance of students over time. Some students with disabilities cannot meet absolute standards for academic skills, particularly in the era of world-class standards. Where such fixed standards exist, students with disabilities may be excluded from participating in the accountability system.

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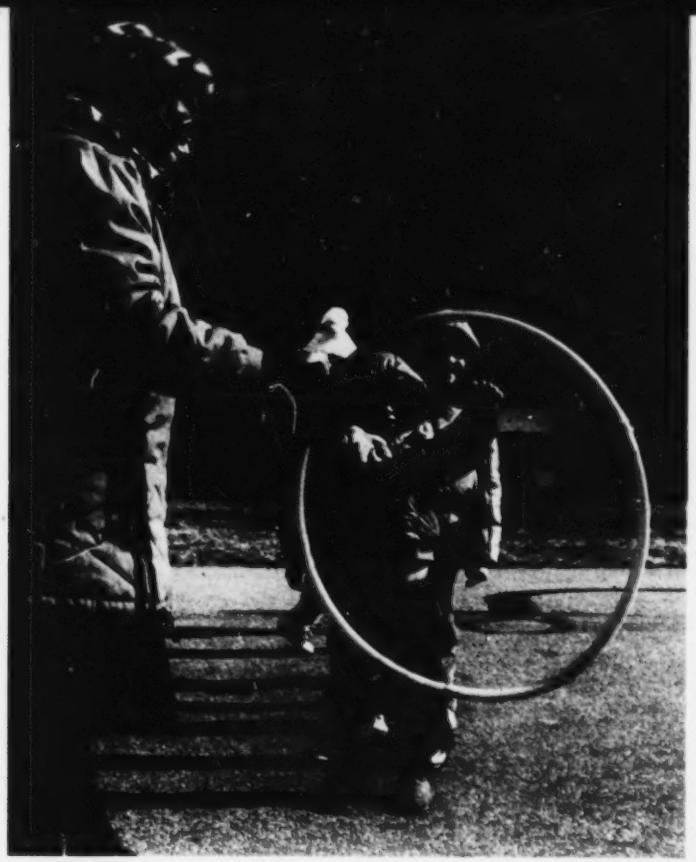
1 **Expectations for student performance need to be set on each of the agreed-upon outcomes for all students. Performance standards must specify how adept or competent students must be to demonstrate that the agreed-upon outcomes have been met.**

- The consensus-building process must extend to the definition of specific performance standards. A broad range of performance standards will accommodate the diversity of all students and will permit all students to participate in the outcomes-based accountability system.
- Performance standards need to be set high for all students, including students with disabilities. Low expectations are sometimes set in the IEPs of students with disabilities and IEP goals and objectives can be lowered when students do not meet them. Setting high standards will require that necessary services and supports are available for all students and that staff receive appropriate training to assist all students in meeting the performance standards.
- The advantages and disadvantages of specific types of standards need to be weighed. Standards that measure relative improvement over time (i.e., gain scores) more closely relate to the impact of schools and teachers on student performance than do fixed standards, which penalize students, schools, or teachers for the low starting point of students. Gain scores, however, may be incompatible with world class standards. The type of standards selected will affect the extent to which the system can include all students.

2 **Decisions will need to be made concerning how student performance will be reported using the standards.**

- In determining whether students have met the performance standards, data frequently are not reported for students with disabilities. That is, schools may not include data for students with disabilities in their school scores because of perceived adverse effects on overall reports of school performance.
- Historically, evaluations of student performance for students with disabilities have been reported in the IEP, but these performance measures have not been aggregated to the classroom, school, or district level. Reporting performance results for all students can provide a means of reinforcing high expectations for all students.
- Decision rules about the inclusion or exclusion of performance scores of all students need to be made an explicit part of the system. Adjustments to assessment results can be made to accommodate the diverse characteristics of students and encourage principals to accept students with disabilities into their buildings. The impact of these adjustments on expectations for student performance needs to be assessed.



"It is essential that we do not lower the bar, to make it more fair or easier, for some students to jump over."

SEA administrator

25

ISSUE 3: IDENTIFY ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Traditionally, performance data have been collected in the form of standardized achievement test results, but concern over the validity of such paper-and-pencil tests has led to the use of other sources of outcome data. These other sources of outcome data may include curriculum-based assessments, alternative assessments (such as portfolios and authentic assessments), functional assessments, school records, and student, parent, or employer surveys. Given the ease of use and reporting, however, standardized tests remain a staple of outcomes-based accountability systems, although alternative assessments are increasingly being used to assess student performance.

What type of information is needed to assess student performance? What type of assessments can accommodate students with widely diverse skills and abilities?

Different performance assessments provide different kinds of information. For example, standardized achievement tests provide outcome data about a student's acquisition of academic knowledge and skills in a particular content area, while performance-based assessments can provide outcome data on a student's ability to apply knowledge and skills across content areas. Where paper-and-pencil achievement tests are used, students with disabilities may be exempted from testing or may struggle through tests far beyond their performance levels. Some accommodations, however, may permit students with disabilities to complete standardized assessments: these might include longer periods of time to take a test, assistance in reading test items, and allowing oral rather than written responses to questions. Alternative assessments such as portfolio assessments hold promise for providing a more practical and less biased portrait of students' skills and learning.

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"The question is, what is the best way to measure ... the outcome ... , not who is measured."

LEA special education director

1 A diverse array of approaches needs to be considered in the selection of assessments appropriate for all students. The feasibility, advantages, and disadvantages of various assessments should be explored.

- The use of standardized tests to assess student performance has been questioned by many educators. In particular, they assert that these tests are not appropriate to measure performance of students with diverse characteristics.
- Nontraditional approaches to assessments, such as portfolios, or curriculum-based assessments, are increasingly being adopted for all students. The ability of such approaches to provide useful information on the performance of students with disabilities, including students with significant disabilities, needs to be evaluated.
- The adequacy of currently available alternative assessments has not been rigorously scrutinized. Although alternative assessments may provide more realistic portrayals of the skills and capabilities of all students, the validity and reliability of such tests need to be explored. Some resistance may be encountered to the use of alternative assessments if validity and reliability cannot be demonstrated.
- There may be no existing assessments that can be used to evaluate student performance appropriately for all students. Moreover, it may be difficult to aggregate the results of alternative assessments to gauge systemwide progress. Developing appropriate alternative assessments and determining their validity can be costly.
- A single assessment may not be sufficient to measure student performance. Thought needs to be given to the use of multiple assessments. This will help to ensure that the outcomes-based accountability system can include all students.

2 **The use and impact of accommodations and adaptations in assessing student performance need to be addressed.**

- Testing accommodations and adaptations are one way that students with disabilities can be included in assessments of student performance. Explicit policies on the appropriate use of such techniques need to be developed to avoid indiscriminate use of such strategies in attempts to increase school performance. Policies on the relationship between accommodations used in instruction and those used in assessment situations will also need to be created.
- Many students with disabilities may not perform well on standardized assessments, particularly if accommodations (e.g., untimed administration) are not used. School officials may be reluctant to allow such accommodations if they are unfamiliar with the options. Staff training on the selection and use of accommodations with standardized assessments will be critical to the ability of the system to include all students.
- Test developers frequently question the impact of accommodations and adaptations on the validity and reliability of assessments. This impact needs to be determined.
- Decisions need to be made on how the results of evaluations will be reported when accommodations and adaptations have been used.

3 **Uniform policies and procedures for determining when exemptions will be allowed will need to be developed.**

- Many states and districts allow students with disabilities to be exempted from assessments based on their IEPs; it is often a decision made by the multidisciplinary evaluation team. Yet explicit policies and standards for when exemptions are appropriate often are not specified and are difficult to enforce. Uniform policies and procedures for exemptions will help to ensure equity and fairness in the system, especially when high-stakes consequences are involved. Rigid policies, however, may lead to the exemption of large numbers of students with disabilities.
- When high-stakes are attached to the results of the accountability system, it is tempting to use exemptions to increase overall school performance. Strategies need to be developed to provide incentives to principals or other school officials that will encourage them to include all students in the performance assessments.
- Special educators may feel the need to exempt students with disabilities from testing situations to avoid high pressure or negative experiences. Indiscriminate use of exemptions may result in the exclusion of large numbers of students capable of completing the assessments.

ISSUE 4: IDENTIFY ACCOUNTABLE PARTIES

Who should be accountable for the outcomes of all students? What roles should special and regular educators play in accountability for students with disabilities?

Agreement about the locus of responsibility for agreed-upon outcomes needs to be reached if students with disabilities are to benefit from the current emphasis on restructuring and accountability. If there is no locus of responsibility—that is, if everyone is responsible—in effect no one is responsible. Students with disabilities, however, often are served by a team of teachers and specialists, some of whom serve children in a number of schools. Other students with disabilities participate in whole- or partial-day programs of instruction at service centers or schools other than their neighborhood school.

Today's reform efforts generally place accountability for student outcomes with schools, that is, the principal and staff of each school. Fiscal rewards, recognition awards, routine reports to the school council, accreditation, report cards, and parental choice — many of the tools of accountability — can be established at the school level. Increasingly, restructuring efforts are transferring more latitude in making decisions about resources, services, and budgets to schools. The movement to create school environments that are fully inclusive of students with disabilities also promotes the school as the accountable party. Embedded in the history of special education, however, is the belief that accountability for students with disabilities should rest with the special education district office and with special education teachers, given their training in alternative instructional approaches and their understanding of the special needs of students with disabilities.

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1 **Decisions are needed about which staff will be accountable for the outcomes of students with disabilities and how the system can instill and encourage responsibility among those identified as accountable.**

- Those staff who will become accountable need to participate in designing the accountability system and in determining how the system will include students with disabilities. This will increase staff support in working toward the desired outcomes and help to ensure that the outcomes reflect the educational experiences afforded all students. It will also diminish efforts to circumvent the system.
- Although restructuring of administrative responsibilities is a current trend among school districts, many districts still make district officials—not principals—responsible for allocating resources for special education services. Attention needs to be given to the inevitable conflicts that will arise if school officials are held accountable for the performance of students with disabilities when they have no authority to allocate resources or limited ability to make changes to improve practice.
- Where these responsibilities are given to schools, conflicts may occur as personnel take on new roles and responsibilities, but this conflict is likely to lessen as personnel work together toward common goals. Moreover, staff training will be needed to give school personnel the skills required to assume these new roles and responsibilities.
- Many students with disabilities receive services from a variety of disciplines and staff. An important decision will be how to reflect all key contributors to a student's program, such as vocational education and related services providers, as well as special and regular education teachers.
- With the trend toward increased site-based management, many schools have established school site councils or other decision making bodies that oversee the development and implementation of policies at the school level. Typically, these responsibilities have resulted both in increased flexibility and accountability at each site. The role of the local council in identifying the accountable party will need to be determined.

"Schools need both the authority and the responsibility for all kids."
LEA special education director

- Some initial confusion may occur among parents and advocates if neighborhood schools become responsible for all students with disabilities, and the locus of advocacy is at the school rather than the district level.
- Some children with disabilities receive services in out-of-district placements such as private schools and regional cooperatives. Some mechanism will need to be established to ensure that the instructional programs for these students are addressing the desired outcomes.

2 The required level of resources (both fiscal and programmatic) that will enable the accountable parties to succeed in obtaining the desired outcomes needs to be identified.

- Classroom teachers and principals often resist being held accountable for the outcomes of students for whose instructional needs they have little experience or formal training. They will require additional training, a team teaching or consultant teacher configuration, or access to outside assistance to improve the breadth of their teaching and diagnostic skills.
- Development of an accountability system that results in improved student performance requires a substantial commitment of personnel resources. Staff must be adequately trained in both the operation of the system and how results can be used to improve instructional practice. Time also must be allocated for planning and curriculum development.
- The long-range costs of using monetary rewards will need to be calculated. Over time, the use of such rewards could require a significant commitment of fiscal resources. Educators may be reluctant to invest in a system that they believe may not continue due to a lack of resources. A balance must be struck, therefore, between a system that is affordable to implement over time and one that is viewed by accountable parties as providing sufficient rewards.
- Effective information management systems will be required to track and report student progress. Computer resources may need to be obligated to implement a system that can provide reports useful to educators.

3 The consequences for the accountable party need to be established.

- The use of rewards rather than sanctions, or vice versa, will create different incentives for different individuals. Some individuals will be more motivated by rewards, others by sanctions.
- The type of rewards or sanctions used also will affect staff differently. For example, will nonmonetary rewards be sufficient to change behaviors? Will staff view technical assistance interventions by the district or state as sanctions?
- Public accountability systems will diffuse the responsibility for student outcomes since there may be no direct consequences for the accountable parties.
- Without express attention to how the system will accommodate the diversity of all students, the use of high-stakes rewards and sanctions can lead to higher rates of referral to special education services and grade retention.

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Part II: The Policy Options

This part of the document provides administrators and policymakers with a set of alternatives, or options, that can guide the development of an outcomes-based accountability system that includes students with disabilities. Each option is presented with specific defining assumptions, key questions, and a variety of possible strategies for implementation. Probable implications of the options are also described. The strategies and implications are meant to be illustrative; what meets the needs of one school or district may be very different from what is required in another. Before reviewing these options, the reader should note an overarching assumption:

> Outcomes-based accountability requires a systemwide evaluation of students' educational performance that results in consequences for the accountable parties. For students with disabilities, an outcomes-based accountability system operates in addition to the individual accountability system imbedded in each student's Individualized Education Plan.

Because the implementation of an outcomes-based accountability system at the local level occurs within the larger context of state and national systems, not all of the options presented here are within the control of a local school system. A number of states have already developed accountability systems that will shape some of the options available to local districts. Moreover, all outcomes-based accountability systems must operate within the framework established by state and federal laws and regulations governing education of students with disabilities. As outcomes-based accountability systems are implemented, the need to consider procedural compliance to ensure that the civil rights of students with disabilities are protected and to ensure them access to an appropriate education will continue.

The options presented have emerged from numerous discussions with policymakers and administrators; they represent broad approaches to the development of outcomes-based accountability systems. Many different designs exist for outcomes-based accountability systems, and various ways to combine the options are possible in order to satisfy each district's unique requirements. Few of the options that follow are mutually exclusive, however. Many options are linked. Decisions about the outcomes to be achieved will affect the establishment of performance standards and the development of assessment strategies. Specific steps for putting an outcomes-based accountability system into practice are discussed in a final section; these steps will be necessary regardless of the options selected.

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SELECT OUTCOMES FOR ALL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Defining expectations of the educational process requires agreement by stakeholders on both the long-term and short-term goals of instruction. These expectations, or outcomes, must reflect the overall goals and mission of a school system and will determine the curriculum to be delivered to students. An outcomes-based accountability system can be designed so that a single set of outcomes applies to all students or a set of outcomes is modified according to the needs of students, such as the needs of students with significant disabilities or the needs of those in community-based work study programs.

Typically, outcomes-based accountability systems have relied on outcomes of academic performance, such as in mathematics, science, writing, or reading. The changing workplace and the needs of diverse populations, however, have expanded the view of what the outcomes of the educational process should be. That is, outcomes specify what students should be able to do and the skills they need, such as communicating, thinking, working, and reasoning. Outcomes differ from content standards, which address what students should know or what the curriculum should cover.

The choices of outcomes for all students and for students with disabilities have been explored in depth by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO). The model of outcomes developed by NCEO for school completion (see Figure 1) resulted from consensus-building processes involving practitioners and experts in both special and regular education (NCEO, 1991). This model suggests outcomes in eight domains, including presence and participation, accommodation and adaptation, physical health, responsibility and independence, contribution and citizenship, academic and functional literacy, personal and social adjustment, and satisfaction.

The process used to select outcomes can have a significant impact on the commitment of personnel to the outcomes-based accountability system. Many outcomes-based accountability systems currently in use were developed under political pressures as a means of improving student performance with little input from special educators. As a result, systems were

created establishing narrow outcomes, with little consideration given to how an increasingly diverse student population, including students with disabilities, would achieve those outcomes.

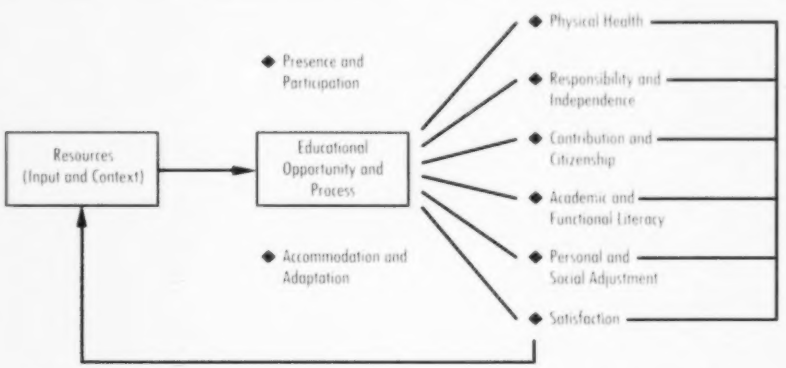
Options:

- **Same set of outcomes; or**
- **Modified set of outcomes.**

Key Questions:

1. Are there current district and/or state policies in place regarding student outcomes and accountability? How much latitude or flexibility exists in the creation of an outcomes-based accountability system at the district level? How are students with disabilities included in the current district and/or state system?
2. What are the desired outcomes of education for all children? Should there be modified outcomes for some students with disabilities? Should the outcomes differ by age, grade level, or type of curriculum? To what extent will nonacademic outcomes be incorporated into the system?
3. To what extent are current district and/or state outcomes reflected in the district curricula? How will the agreed-upon outcomes relate to existing curricula and educational programming? How will curricula and programming be changed to reflect the agreed-upon outcomes?

Figure 1
NCEO School Completion Model of Outcomes



Source: National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO, 1991)

◆ = Outcome Domain

Option: Same Set of Outcomes

This option establishes a single set of outcomes for all students. Implicit in this option is the belief that there are common outcomes that all students should be expected to achieve. Yet the option recognizes that outcomes, performance standards, and assessment strategies need to reflect the diversity and needs of all students, including those with disabilities. For example, outcomes related to personal autonomy or independence, which can be operationalized into specific and measurable attainments during school, reflect this diversity.

Assumptions

There is one set of desired outcomes to which all students are entitled and that all students can attain; these outcomes are valued and accepted as legitimate by all educators as well as parents, students, administrators, the school board, and the community.

The individual educational needs of students with disabilities can be met where one set of outcomes is adopted for all students.

Special education students will have access to the curriculum designed to address the agreed-upon outcomes.

Nonacademic outcomes such as personal responsibility and independent living skills—which are highly valued by many parents of students with disabilities—will be included as appropriate in the agreed-upon outcomes.

The selection of appropriate performance standards and assessments can assure that all students are able to participate in a system that uses one set of outcomes for everyone.

Strategies to Consider

Select the Appropriate Outcomes:

Review existing outcome models and frameworks, including statewide models and the NCEO model, to assist in selecting the appropriate outcomes.

Select outcomes through a collaborative process that includes personnel with responsibility for serving students with diverse characteristics, including students with disabilities.

Obtain the explicit support of school boards and superintendents as well as parents and community members on the agreed-upon outcomes.

Use district- and school-level mission statements to frame the outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities.

Select outcomes that are broad enough to guide the instruction of all students. To ensure the inclusion of all students, these outcomes must be broader than the content covered in specific coursework.

IEPs:

Determine what the relationship will be between the outcomes and IEP goals and objectives on an individual student basis. For example, will the outcomes be incorporated into IEP goals? Will specially designed instruction assist students in meeting the agreed-upon outcomes?

Where a relationship does exist between the outcomes and IEP goals and objectives, modify IEPs to show how specially designed instruction will assist the student in meeting them.

Align the IEP goals and objectives with the outcomes by grouping student goals and objectives under each outcome.

Student progress toward the outcomes can be shown in a graphic in the IEP.

In designing a reporting process for the system, build in the capacity to aggregate the information in IEPs for site-, program- and district-level reporting.

Procedural Safeguards:

If outcomes are incorporated into IEPs, show parents and advocates how meeting these outcomes will become part of an appropriate education for students with disabilities.

Demonstrate to parents and advocates how the individualized needs of students can be met as they work to meet the outcomes. Use specific examples to show them how meeting individual goals and objectives will result in meeting the outcomes; for instance, show them how students' fulfilling individual goals and objectives in writing will permit them to achieve the desired outcome for communications skills.

Implications

This option facilitates accurate aggregate comparisons, particularly for students receiving multiple services, since all students will have the same outcomes.

If outcomes are too narrowly defined, some students with disabilities may fail to achieve the desired outcomes and disengage from school, leading to underachievement, and lower overall attendance and graduation rates.

One set of outcomes will drive the development of a more unified district curriculum. This will increase opportunities for collaboration among regular and special educators. Increased sensitivity to instructional diversity for all students and lower referral rates to special education may also result.

Where the outcomes do not overlap with IEP goals and objectives, additional burdens may be placed on students and teachers.

Overlapping outcomes and IEP goals and objectives promote collaboration among special and general educators and ensure that specially designed instruction will be aligned with the student's curriculum.

A single set of outcomes will facilitate the access of special education students to the district's core curriculum and can promote a rich and appropriately rigorous instructional program for students with disabilities.

Where IEP goals and objectives are not related to outcomes, students may be pulled out of regular classes designed to assist them in meeting the outcomes, so that special education IEP goals and objectives can be met.

Some parents may resist the use of the outcomes unless they are satisfied that their children's individual needs will be met.

If IEPs and programs are altered to include outcomes without sufficient information being given to parents and advocates, legal challenges may be made asserting that an appropriate education is not being provided or that individualized needs are not being met.

Regular education personnel can more easily be held accountable for outcomes of special education students and thus accept more responsibility for their education.

Option: Modified Set of Outcomes

This option is based on the belief that outcomes may need to be modified or tailored for some students with disabilities to reflect their diverse functional abilities and educational needs. It assumes that the goals and content of educational services designed for some students, particularly those with significant disabilities, differ qualitatively from those for other students. Outcomes could be modified to encompass students requiring specialized curricula or programs, such as self-care and independent living, vocational education, or community-based work study. Alternatively, some students might be required to achieve a limited number of the agreed-upon outcomes.

Assumptions

Some students will not be able to achieve all of the academic outcomes included in the system. The large majority of students with disabilities, however, will have the same outcomes as their nondisabled peers.

Use of a modified set of outcomes will enable all students to be included in the outcomes-based accountability system.

Some students with disabilities have unique educational needs—for example, self-care needs—that require a modified set of outcomes that can be used for accountability purposes. It is educationally acceptable for those students to have a modified set of outcomes.

Nonacademic outcomes such as personal responsibility and independent living skills—which are highly valued by many parents of students with disabilities—will be included as appropriate in the agreed-upon outcomes.

Strategies to Consider

Select the Appropriate Outcomes:

In the process of selecting the modified outcomes, include both regular education and special education stakeholders, especially parents and students, to assure that the outcomes reflect the needs of students with disabilities. Involve stakeholders in a regular review of the modified outcomes to assure that high expectations are set for all students.

Review existing models of outcomes including statewide models and the NCEO model to assist in selecting appropriate outcomes.

Use district- and school-level mission statements as a backdrop against which to define appropriate outcomes that can be modified for some students with disabilities or diverse learning needs.

Identify students who will not be able to meet the agreed-upon outcomes, and modify outcomes for those students.

Identify students who may not be able to attain all of the agreed-upon outcomes, and select a subset of the outcomes that are most appropriate to their needs.

Establish policies to enable students to progress from working toward modified outcomes to the outcomes for the majority of students.

Establish policies to protect against over-identification of those students working toward modified outcomes.

IEPs:

Note in the IEP where modified outcomes will be used for the student, and specify those outcomes.

Align IEP goals and objectives and the modified outcomes by grouping student goals and objectives under each outcome.

Add a section to IEPs to show student progress toward the outcomes; for example, progress toward an outcome could be shown in a graphic or on a numbered continuum.

Strategies to Consider (cont.)

Procedural Safeguards:

Assure parents and advocates that procedural safeguards are being met as the outcomes-based accountability system is being implemented; provide training sessions and written materials explaining how the outcomes-based accountability system will improve outcomes while retaining all procedural safeguards.

Include parents as partners in helping to select and modify outcomes for their child and in helping to achieve those outcomes.

Show parents and advocates how the individualized needs of their students will be met in the outcomes-based accountability system; that is, show them the relationships among the students' individual goals and objectives, the modified outcomes, and their postschool outcomes.

Describe to parents early on any implications of the use of modified outcomes for the exit document their child will receive; for example, the use of modified outcomes may prevent the child from obtaining a standard diploma.

Discuss the need for modified outcomes with parents to assure them that their children are not being denied equal access to the benefits of the accountability system.

Implications

No one will be excluded from the outcomes-based accountability system because of a disability, and all will share the benefits of the system through improved outcomes.

The risk that the educational goals and needs of students with moderate and significant disabilities will go unnoticed is lower in a system using a modified set of outcomes compared with one using the same outcomes for all students.

Different assessments may be needed to measure performance on the modified outcomes; significant time and resources may be required to develop or select these assessments.

If IEPs and services are altered to include outcomes without sufficient information being given to parents and advocates, legal challenges may be made asserting that an appropriate education is not being provided or that individualized needs are not being met.

Increased referral and identification of students for special education may occur if regular education personnel view the modified outcomes as less demanding than the outcomes for all other students, particularly if high stakes are incorporated into the system.

This option can provide highly specific and focused outcomes that are linked to specific instructional services and reflect the specialized skills and behaviors taught to students with disabilities.

The modification of outcomes may require different or modified curricula and instruction, which may, in turn, lead to separate "tracks" or separate classes for students with disabilities.

Where modified outcomes are used, students with disabilities may not be challenged to realize their full potential, resulting in lowered expectations for these students.

The use of a modified set of outcomes can perpetuate the notion that some students receiving special education services are the responsibility only of special education.

As the number of students striving toward some modified outcomes may be small, reporting results at the school or classroom level may not be possible because of potential violations of confidentiality.

Comparisons of school results will be difficult because all students will not be striving toward the same outcomes.

Parents may resist this option, feeling that their children are being excluded from the system of accountability established for most students.

ESTABLISH PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Performance standards are statements of the acceptable level of student accomplishment on measures of outcomes; standards set specific expectations for performance. For each outcome, indicators or measures must be established to determine if the outcome has been achieved; assessments or other sources of information provide these measures. Performance standards are the benchmarks against which student performance is judged in an outcomes-based accountability system. Accountable parties must be cognizant of the standards as well as the consequences that will result when student performance does or does not meet the standards.

Performance standards must specify the desired results of the accountability system for the student population. For example, it is not enough to say that students will show mastery of a particular subject area; rather, mastery must be defined. Considerable variation is likely to occur in the definition of mastery. One district might define mastery in mathematics in terms of a score of 65 percent on a state assessment, while another might define it as a score of 80 percent on the same test. Alternatively, a district could define different levels of mastery for mathematics, such as novice, emerging, skilled, or distinguished. Still, each of these levels would need to be defined, and appropriate assessment strategies would need to be developed or identified.

To assess whether a school or district has achieved an outcome, a standard is set indicating the proportion of students expected to achieve the outcome. Student attainment on an assessment (or set of assessments) is then compared with a performance standard to determine whether the school or district has met the outcome. An example of a school performance standard might be: "90 percent of a school's student population must demonstrate competency in math by obtaining a passing score on a state math assessment." Alternatively, a school performance

standard could be: "the school must increase by 10 percent the proportion of students obtaining a passing score on a state math assessment."

With the creation of outcomes-based accountability systems, standards must be created for the agreed-upon outcomes that set high expectations for all students. When one set of outcomes is set for all students, the question must be asked: Do we expect all students to achieve the same level of performance—that is, to meet the same standards? The same performance standards may be created for all students, or different performance standards may be created for students on the basis of their abilities.

Options:
- **Same performance standards; or**
- **Different performance standards.**

Performance standards may measure change in student performance over time or compare student performance to a fixed standard. The use of fixed performance standards may create unrealistic or even impossible standards for some students, particularly in academic areas. If the accountability system is based on fixed standards for all students, schools and districts will be held accountable for bringing all students to the fixed performance level. Measures of change in student performance over time (i.e., relative standards) more closely relate to the impact of schools and teachers and do not penalize students, schools, or districts for having low baseline achievement.

Key Questions:

1. What performance standards are currently being used at the district and/or state levels? What flexibility exists for using other standards? Do existing performance standards require a level of mastery that will doom some students to failure?
2. Can performance standards be created to determine if students are achieving their "personal best"?
3. Will different performance standards be used for some students?
4. Will fixed standards be used, or will changes in performance over time be included in performance standards?

Option: Same Performance Standards

This option establishes a single standard of student performance for each outcome; the standard applies to all students who are working toward meeting that outcome. Standards may be fixed (i.e., an absolute level of performance) or relative (i.e., a change in performance over time). The option is based on the belief that all students, including those with disabilities, should be challenged to achieve high levels of performance. By using the same high performance standards for all students, students with disabilities will be challenged to meet high expectations; that challenge may not occur if different, lower standards are used. Standards may be created for different grades, levels of schooling (elementary, middle, senior high), or for graduation.

Assumptions

Performance standards are meaningful and attainable by all students who have the same outcomes.

Use of the same performance standards for all students will ensure that they are progressing and gaining a common core of knowledge.

High expectations for all students will result in higher performance by all students.

Strategies to Consider

Create Performance Standards:

Use a collaborative process to develop performance standards. Include regular educators, community agencies that work with students with disabilities, parents of students with disabilities, and the students themselves.

Meet with business and community leaders to determine their expectations for student performance.

Review performance standards currently in use to determine how they might relate to the outcomes-based accountability system. These might include state standards or standards in use for programs such as those for educationally disadvantaged students or for students with limited English proficiency.

Create standards for all agreed-upon outcomes, including nonacademic areas.

Create fixed standards that can be achieved by all students. A fixed performance standard for the school might be: "95 percent of all graduating students will demonstrate competency in math by achieving a score of 75 percent on the district math assessment" or "all students will perform at the proficient level on the district math assessment."

Establish accountability for student progress, not absolute standards of performance. For example, a relative performance standard might be: "From fourth to fifth grade, the number of students who achieve competency in math will increase by 10 percent; competency in math is defined as a 5 percent increase in the student's score on the district math assessment."

Create performance levels that are based on a standard of competence; categorize performance by using broad categories such as "novice" or "expert," or use bands of performance levels (e.g., level 1 to level 5) rather than scores or percentiles.

IEPs:

Include performance standards in IEPs for all of the agreed-upon outcomes, not just those that apply to the specially designed instruction.

Use performance standards to evaluate students' success in meeting their IEP goals and objectives.

Show student progress toward meeting the performance standards in IEPs.

Results/Use of Information:

Statistically adjust individual school scores so that the reported results incorporate the characteristics of the school's students. For example, use regression techniques to control for variability in a school's score that may be associated with its student characteristics, such as the proportions of students with disabilities, those with limited English proficiency, or those who are educationally disadvantaged.

Compare schools to themselves to demonstrate the amount of progress or decline over time.

Use performance results to demonstrate where more resources are needed to help students meet the standards.

Implications

By using the same high standards for all students, high expectations are created for all students, including students with disabilities.

The use of the same performance standards for all students and particularly, attaching rewards and/or sanctions to student attainment of these standards, may lead to practices that exclude students with disabilities from assessments.

This option may promote the use of the same assessments for all students.

The use of the same standards for all students will provide increased opportunities for students with disabilities to demonstrate that they can meet high levels of performance.

This option can facilitate more accurate cross-school and cross-group (e.g., grade level) comparisons.

If results are reported collectively, a tendency to focus instruction and resources on students who have the greatest chance of meeting the standards may occur.

The use of the same performance standards may increase the likelihood that students with disabilities will graduate with a standard diploma.

Principals may be less receptive to accepting students with disabilities in the neighborhood school because the students may not be able to meet the performance standards.

Students with disabilities may experience significant pressure to achieve standards that are beyond their functional abilities.

Referrals to special education or other programs for students with special needs may increase for students who are unable to meet the performance standards.

Use of the same standards for all students may lead to the development of IEPs that are not sufficiently individualized unless sufficient training is provided.

Low performance standards will not challenge many students, while high performance standards will frustrate some students.

Option: Different Performance Standards

This option establishes different performance standards for students according to their unique educational needs, such as functional ability, type of disability, or language proficiency. Different performance standards take into account the educational needs of students; for example, different performance standards can be created for students with different curricula. Different performance standards may be needed for students with disabilities to acquire the skills necessary to participate in the regular education curriculum. That is, different standards might be used in the elementary years, for example, while the student masters strategies for reading. When that student gets to high school, different performance standards may no longer be a necessity.

Assumptions

Some students with disabilities cannot meet performance standards set for regular education students, particularly for academic skills.

Some students have diverse educational needs that require different performance standards; students can be challenged by different performance standards that provide high expectations but do not sentence students to failure.

Different performance standards will be needed where modified outcomes are used, but they may also be used when all students have the same outcomes.

Strategies to Consider

Create Performance Standards:

Include stakeholders of special needs populations in the creation of performance standards.

Review performance standards currently in use at the school, district, and state levels, noting where changes will be needed to include students with disabilities.

Identify students for whom the performance standards are not appropriate, and establish standards based on their unique educational needs. For example, standards might be established for students according to their functional abilities.

Create different performance standards only for some outcomes based on the needs and skills of the students. Where common outcomes apply, use the performance standards for all students.

Establish policies to protect against over-identification of students who will work toward different performance standards.

IEPs:

Note in the student's IEP that different performance standards will be used for this student rather than those being used for other students.

Note in the IEP the implications of the use of different performance standards, particularly if it will result in a student's not receiving a standard diploma.

Set high but realistic standards in IEPs to encourage students to achieve their best.

Show periodic student progress toward meeting performance standards in IEPs.

Results/Use of Information:

Create unique reporting techniques for displaying results according to those standards. Specify the number of students being judged according to the unique standard or standards.

Where the number of students using a particular standard is small, combining results may be prudent to avoid confidentiality issues. For example, display the results across the district rather than for individual schools.

Implications

The use of different performance standards will increase opportunities for all students to be part of the outcomes-based accountability system.

This option is more compatible with the use of individual goals and objectives for students with disabilities.

Different performance standards may perpetuate lower expectations for, and thus, achievement of students with disabilities. Periodic reviews will be necessary to ensure that high expectations are set.

Using different performance standards for students with disabilities will lessen pressures on these students to achieve beyond their functional abilities.

The use of different performance standards may be viewed as a safety valve for students who are failing in regular education. More students may be identified as having disabilities than appropriate if regular education views the different performance standards as less stringent.

Cross-school and cross-group comparisons are more difficult to conduct when different standards are used; any aggregation of data becomes problematic.

The use of separate standards perpetuates the distinctions between regular education and special education.

The use of different standards may require different exit documents where attainment of particular standards is attached to the receipt of a diploma (i.e., a state-endorsed diploma).

One set of standards (i.e., those in use by the majority of students) tends to be valued more by stakeholders, including staff, parents, and community and board of education members. Differentiated standards, if viewed as less rigorous, may not be used for program improvement or may receive scant attention from those outside the special education community.

Using different performance standards will enable students with disabilities to participate in the same assessments as their nondisabled peers.

IDENTIFY ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Student performance data traditionally have been collected in the form of standardized paper-and-pencil tests that measure discrete knowledge. Concern over the validity of these tests and interest in examining more diverse skills have led to the use of various other sources of information. These include curriculum-based assessments, alternative assessments (such as performance and authentic assessments), functional assessments, school records, and student, parent, and employer surveys. These various sources provide different types of information on student performance. Standardized assessments yield a picture of student acquisition of knowledge and skills in a particular content area; alternative assessments provide information on students' ability to apply their knowledge and skills across content areas. Some argue for the use of multiple assessments to assure the fair and accurate measurement of student performance; the use of multiple assessments provides not only several measures of student performance, but also different types of information to evaluate whether or not students have met the agreed-upon outcomes.

While standardized assessments are used in many outcomes-based accountability systems, alternative assessments are increasingly being used in conjunction with standardized assessments. Students with disabilities are routinely exempted or excluded from participation in standardized assessments (NCEO, 1992). Alternative assessments such as performance-based and authentic assessments hold promise for providing a more comprehensive and realistic portrayal of the skills and learning of all students. Because they tend to be used under more flexible conditions (e.g., no time constraints), alternative assessments can provide greater opportunities for students with special needs to be included in the outcomes-based accountability system. There has been considerable debate, however, as to the validity and reliability of alternative assessments for assessing student performance.

To assure equal treatment for students with disabilities, accommodations and adaptations must be available no matter what types of assessments are used in the outcomes-based accountability system. Such adaptations or accommodations might include a different test setting or presentation format. The impact of accommodations and adaptations on assessment results has not yet been thoroughly explored.

Options:

- **Standardized assessments; or**
- **Alternative assessments.**

Key Questions:

1. What types of information are needed to assess student performance on the agreed-upon outcomes? What types of assessments can provide this information?
2. What types of assessments are currently available in the district or school to measure student performance?
3. Can assessments be developed that can accommodate students with widely diverse skills and abilities?
4. How will the results of the assessments be reported?

Option: Standardized Assessments

This option designates the same set of standardized assessments for all students who have the same outcomes. Adaptations and accommodations will need to be provided for students with disabilities. For example, students may be given more time to complete the assessment or may complete the assessment orally rather than in writing. Under this option, significant changes will need to be made in the administration of standardized assessments for many students with disabilities. Currently, students with disabilities are frequently excluded from state and national testing that relies on standardized assessments. Different approaches are used to decide the extent to which students with disabilities participate in assessments. These approaches include the following: (1) IEP teams make the decision; (2) the extent to which students participate in regular education instruction determines their participation in assessments (e.g., all students who spend more than half of the school day in class with their nondisabled peers participate in the assessments); and (3) all students with IEPs are excluded (NCEO, 1993b). Most often, clear guidelines do not exist for this participation, and enforcement of the guidelines is inconsistent.

Assumptions

Standardized assessments will provide the information necessary to measure the extent to which students are meeting the agreed-upon outcomes.

Standardized assessments can provide uniform, valid, and reliable data for implementing the consequences of the accountability system.

Adaptations of and accommodations to standardized assessments will be used to ensure that virtually all students including students with disabilities can participate in the assessments.

The number of waivers and/or exclusions permitted will be minimized. Precise guidelines will be constructed concerning waivers and/or exclusions of students with disabilities from the assessment process.

Strategies to Consider

Specify the Assessments:

Include special education stakeholders in the selection of standardized assessment measures.

Identify standardized assessment instruments appropriate for measuring performance on the agreed-upon outcomes for all students.

Establish procedures for the inclusion of students in nongraded programs. Will these students be tested with their same-age peers?

Develop or implement necessary accommodations and adaptations for students with disabilities; these might include changes in presentation format (e.g., Braille editions of tests, oral reading of directions, interpretation of directions), setting of test (alone in carrel, with small groups, at home, in special education class), response format (use template for responding, point to response, give response orally, use computer for responding), and timing of test (extended time, more breaks during test, extending testing over a period of days) (NCEO, 1993b).

Evaluate the impact of the use of accommodations and adaptations on the reliability and validity of the assessments.

Establish explicit policies on which accommodations may be used for individual students and when they may be used (e.g., only those used routinely to provide instruction to the student can be used in the assessment situation).

Provide multiple opportunities for students to take standardized assessments and thus achieve performance standards. Establish specific guidelines for the use of multiple test-taking opportunities.

Develop specific policies on waivers and/or exclusions for students with special needs to minimize exemptions. Monitor the use of these policies to assure they are not misused.

Personnel Roles:

Make school personnel part of the decision-making process with regard to the selection of assessments to facilitate their acceptance of the accountability system.

Train personnel to select and provide appropriate accommodations and adaptations.

Train personnel in how to use the results of standardized assessments to improve educational programs.

Strategies to Consider (cont.)

IEPs:

Establish in the IEP how the student will participate in the standardized assessments; base this decision on district policies concerning waivers and/or exclusions.

In the assessment process, provide all adaptations and accommodations necessary as indicated in the student's IEP. Accommodations must be those used in the student's daily program; they should not be introduced during the testing period.

Where IEP goals and objectives are related to the agreed-upon outcomes, use assessment results to graph or chart student progress on outcomes and include them in the IEP.

Procedural Safeguards:

Assess whether it is appropriate to use the standardized assessments to measure individual student performance during the annual IEP review.

On the basis of district policies regarding waivers and/or exclusions from the assessments, discuss with parents how their child will participate in the standardized assessment. If this decision is to be made by the multidisciplinary team, include parents in the decision-making process.

Results/Use of Information:

Train personnel in reporting and using results to improve instructional services.

Include the scores of all students, including those with disabilities, in school and district reports.

Report the proportion of students exempted from the assessment to encourage greater participation.

Implications

This option can promote the participation of students with disabilities in classes with their nondisabled peers if exemptions and waivers are not used; where exclusions are widespread for students with disabilities, referrals for special education services may increase.

Unless strict guidelines for inclusion of all students are used and accommodations are available, this option may lead to high rates of exemption or waivers for students with disabilities in an attempt to raise performance levels.

Some students with disabilities are likely to experience greater psychological and time burdens than other students when they participate in assessments that may be difficult for them because of their specific disabilities.

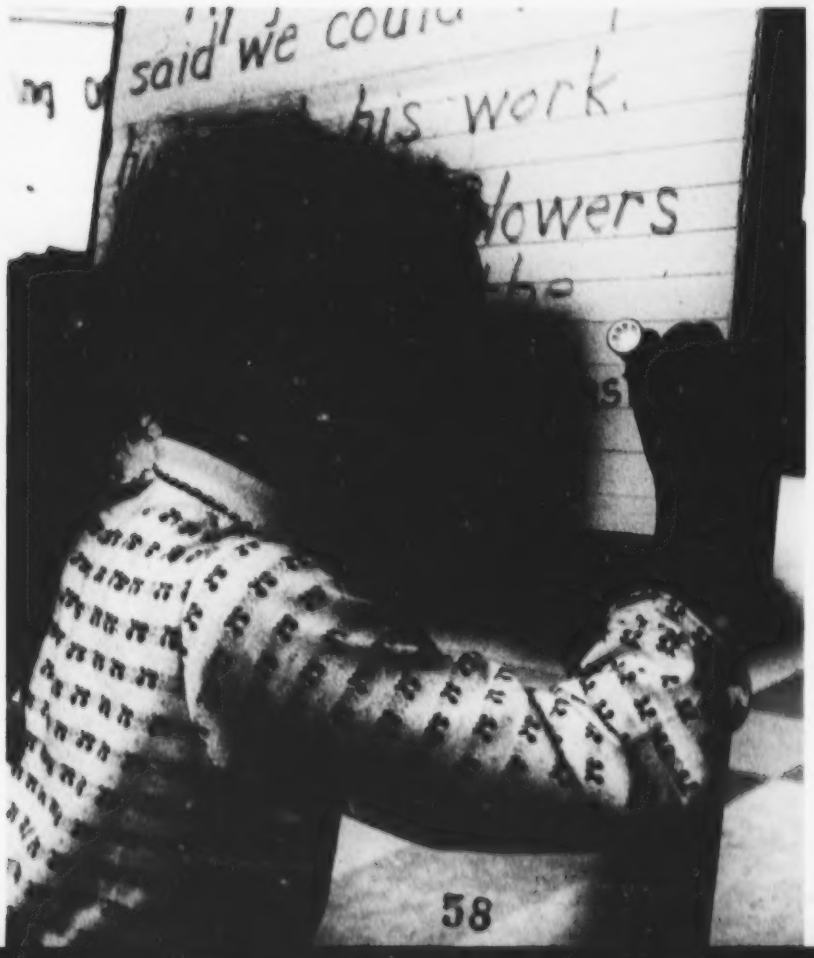
Where students must obtain "mastery scores" on standardized assessments of the outcomes-based accountability system to be awarded diplomas, students with disabilities may receive, not endorsed diplomas, but certificates of completion or diplomas without endorsements. This may limit their postgraduation potential as wage earners.

This option facilitates comparisons such as those among schools and classrooms.

When accommodations are permitted, questions are likely to arise about the validity of standardized tests. For example, are the tests still measuring what they were intended to measure?

The logistics of providing accommodations on test days may create significant problems unless carefully planned.

Unless precluded, accommodations brought in on the test day that were not provided during the school year may provide an inaccurate picture of a student's performance and abilities.



Option: Alternative Assessments

Alternative assessments require students to demonstrate actively their skills and/or mastery of what they have learned rather than their acquisition of discrete knowledge. They may take several forms, including portfolios, experiments, oral presentations, writing samples, exhibits, open-ended problems, computer simulations, and other approaches that require students to synthesize their knowledge and skills across content areas. The use of alternative assessments may facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in the outcomes-based accountability system by providing an alternative to the exclusion of students with disabilities from standardized assessments. Alternative assessments may be used to measure the performance of all students or may be used solely to assess the performance of students with disabilities. As with standardized assessments, accommodations and adaptations may be necessary for students with disabilities when alternative assessments are used.

Assumptions

Alternative assessments permit students to illustrate their problem-solving and critical thinking skills in real-world situations, thus providing more valid indicators of student knowledge.

The performance of all students with disabilities should be assessed; accommodations and adaptations will be provided as needed.

Assessments should reflect the diversity of the educational goals of students who receive special education services; these goals frequently are not reflected in standardized assessments.

Alternative assessments can accommodate the diverse learning styles of all students, including those with disabilities, more easily than can standardized assessments.

Strategies to Consider

Specify the Assessments:

Include special education stakeholders in the selection and/or development of assessments.

Use alternative assessments for all students to determine their status on the performance standards; these might include portfolios, simulations, group projects, experiments, and extended tasks.

Establish guidelines for identifying those students for whom the standardized assessments are not appropriate (e.g., students with functional curricula), and develop alternative assessments for these students only.

Permit students to participate in some standardized assessments, and use alternative assessments as needed.

Identify or develop assessment tools that are reliable and have been validated for specific student groups, such as performance checklists and exit performance assessments.

Define multiple ways to assess each of the agreed-upon outcomes to include students with various learning levels and styles and develop procedures for determining which students will be assessed with each type of assessment.

Implement necessary accommodations and adaptations for students with disabilities.

Consider sampling the students to be assessed on all of the agreed-upon outcomes to lessen the cost and burden; alternatively, assess all students, but do not assess all students on all outcomes.

IEPs:

In the assessment process, provide all accommodations specified in each student's IEP that are used to provide specially designed instruction.

Establish in the IEP how the student will participate in the alternative assessments; base this decision on district policies concerning waivers and/or exclusions.

Include in the IEP graphs or charts that show student progress toward those agreed-upon outcomes that are related to the student's individual goals and objectives.

Strategies to Consider (cont.)

Procedural Safeguards:

Where standardized assessments are in use, assess whether the student is able to use the standardized assessments. Where this is not possible, identify alternative assessments to be used. This could become part of the annual IEP review.

Where the multidisciplinary team makes decisions about waivers and/or exclusions, involve parents in making decisions concerning alternative assessments to be used with their children, and tell them how the results will be shared with them.

Discuss with parents the potential implications of the use of alternative assessments. For example, students may receive nonstandard exit documents, such as certificates of completion or modified diplomas, when they do not participate in the assessment of the majority of students.

Personnel Roles:

Train staff on the use of alternative assessments and any flexibility allowed to ensure adequate implementation.

A phase-in period for alternative assessments will be needed to familiarize staff and students with the assessments.

Results/Use of Information:

Develop methods for reporting results of alternative assessments to parents and teachers in ways that are meaningful to them.

Train teachers in how to make changes in instruction that are based on the results of the alternative assessments.

Code alternative assessment strategies and internal performance criteria to facilitate systematic aggregation of progress data and longitudinal computerized tracking of progress over time; this allows for cross-school and cross-district comparisons of relative progress.

Report the proportion of students exempted from the assessment to encourage greater participation.

Implications

Where all students use alternative assessments:

Use of alternative assessments may reduce bias in testing and consequently lessen the referral rate of minorities to special education.

The costs of developing and testing alternative assessments may be significant.

When teachers view alternative assessments as a more accurate assessment of student performance, they will be more likely to change instruction on the basis of assessment results.

Depending on the type of alternative assessment used, this option may permit all students to participate in the outcomes-based accountability system.

The use of alternative assessments may be challenged by parents and some educators due to questions concerning the validity and reliability of these assessments.

Fewer accommodations and adaptations may be needed for students with disabilities than is the case for standardized assessments.

Inappropriate referrals to special education as a means to avoid participation in standardized assessments may be reduced.

Where group tasks are part of the assessment process, scoring may need to be adjusted when students with disabilities are included in the group.

Students may need to be trained in alternative test-taking strategies.

The results of alternative assessments such as portfolios may be less highly valued by employers, colleges, and training institutions.

Where only some students with disabilities use alternative assessments:

Systemwide indicators of student performance will be difficult to create if some students use different assessments.

Reports of student performance may be presented separately for students using alternative assessments, perpetuating the perception of a separate system of education for students with disabilities.

Students who participate in alternative assessments may be separated from other students in coursework.

The use of alternative assessments and reports may lead to increased referral and identification rates if the alternative assessment is viewed as less stringent, thereby providing a safety valve for students who are failing in the regular system.

Because staff are not as familiar with the results of various alternative assessments, the need for training to ensure that changes are made in instruction based on the assessment results may be greater than would be the case where all students use the same alternative assessment.

Students who are assessed using alternative assessments may receive nonstandard school exit documents, such as certificates of completion or modified diplomas.

IDENTIFY ACCOUNTABLE PARTIES

Agreement on the locus of responsibility for the accomplishment of student outcomes needs to occur if all students are to benefit from the accountability system. Ideally, all involved in the educational process—from state administrators to district superintendents to parents and to students themselves—should have some accountability for outcomes. If everyone is responsible, in effect no one is responsible.

The evolution of special education as a separate program has created a "your student/our student" mindset within local schools. Special education officials are frequently viewed as responsible and accountable for students with disabilities even though many students with disabilities spend the majority of their school day in regular education programs. Current federal and state regulations for special education typically lead to some level of centralized program oversight. States are

held accountable for the provision of a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities; school districts are required to comply with a number of special education procedural mandates. Although procedural compliance for special education traditionally has been centralized in the district administrative office, in many districts, recent local restructuring efforts establish the school as the locus of accountability for the outcomes of all students.

While accountability may rest with any entity associated with the district, such as the local school board, district superintendent, school principals, classroom teachers, or a school council, current efforts to provide more autonomy to schools typically place accountability for all students with the school principal. Direct consequences such as rewards or sanctions result for the accountable party, depending on whether or not the students in each school can demonstrate they have met the agreed-upon outcomes. Indirect consequences may result when school report cards are published in the local newspaper; principals may be compared to one another based on the results, and parents may look more or less favorably on some schools.

Options:

- School-based accountable parties; or
- District- and school-based accountable parties.

Key Questions:

1. Who should be accountable for the outcomes of students with disabilities? Should the accountable parties differ for students who spend most of their time outside of regular education?
2. What are the roles of special and regular educators in accountability for the outcomes of students with disabilities?
3. Will different parties be accountable for outcomes and special education's procedural requirements?

Option: School-Based Accountable Parties

This option makes school personnel responsible for the agreed-upon outcomes of all students. No longer does special education or its teachers and related service providers have accountability for students with disabilities. Under an accountability system based at the school level, for example, the principal would be accountable for **all** students, including those with disabilities, those with limited English proficiency, and other special needs students. Alternatively, a team of teachers or individual teachers can be made responsible for the students they teach. Because special education historically has been viewed as a separate program directed from the district office, this option will require rethinking the roles of special and regular education. New personnel roles and relationships are likely to develop as school personnel assume responsibility for **all students.**

As schools become accountable for **the outcomes of all students, including** students with disabilities, the question arises **of what role schools will play in special** education procedural accountability. For **the foreseeable future, state educational** agencies and school districts likely will remain **legally responsible for procedural** compliance. It is logical to assume, however, **that as systems are implemented** schools may take on additional responsibilities **to assure that laws and regulations are** carried out.

Assumptions

School-level personnel will be responsible for ensuring that the agreed-upon outcomes for all students are met and that all students with disabilities receive the special education services specified in their IEPs.

Those educators closest to the students are in the best position to assume responsibility for student outcomes.

Consequences at the school level will be attached to student accomplishment of, or failure to accomplish, the agreed-upon outcomes; accountable parties will experience direct and/or indirect consequences.

Considerable time and effort will be needed to implement school-based accountability because school and district personnel will need to take on new roles and responsibilities. In addition, considerable training, facilitation, and support will be needed to assure that the implementation of school-based accountability results in improved outcomes for all students.

Strategies to Consider

Designate the Accountable Party:

Assess the current status of reform efforts in the school district with respect to accountable parties. Who is currently responsible for the outcomes of students? Are different parties accountable for the outcomes of students with disabilities?

Create task forces that include district- and school-level stakeholders to identify the accountable party.

Establish district policies to ensure the implementation of school-based accountability.

Make neighborhood schools accountable for all students in their attendance area—including students with disabilities—even if they attend school in separate facilities.

Include the scores of students who are placed in schools outside their neighborhood in the reports of their neighborhood schools.

Allow the serving school to decide whether to retain accountability for those students who are not served in their neighborhood school.

Provide incentives such as free continuing education courses to encourage school personnel to accept accountability for all students.

Phase in the transferal of accountability for students with disabilities from district to school personnel.

Work with special education and regular education advisory groups to promote a collaborative ethic of accountability and prepare schools and staff for changes that will result from the implementation of school-based accountability.

Governance/Administration:

Provide training and support to principals and site-level staff on school-based accountability; in particular, provide assistance in the assumption of new roles and responsibilities.

Develop district plans that involve all stakeholders to plan for and implement school-based accountability. Include the transfer of accountability to the school in district-level strategic plans.

Have district personnel provide quality control to assure that students with disabilities are included in all aspects of the outcomes-based accountability system. For example, have district personnel enforce policies regarding exemptions from assessments and reporting.

Have district staff provide staff training, technical assistance, and ongoing support on procedural compliance. For example, assign district personnel to facilitate the change in the accountable party from the district to the school level.

Transfer resources traditionally held at the district level to the school to assure that school staff are able to implement instructional change on the basis of assessment results.

Provide schools with all information necessary to provide instruction and services to all students with disabilities, including the computer technology to facilitate progress monitoring.

Involve parents and local site governance councils in the development of school-based accountability to help create accepting environments toward students with disabilities.

Include special education teaching staff in school-based management and participatory decision making at the school level.

Strategies to Consider (cont.)

IEPs:

Involve a representative of the accountable party in the development of the IEP. Individuals are more likely to support what they help to create.

Note in the IEP that the school is accountable for student outcomes and that results for the student will be included in the school accountability report.

Specify a particular member of the school staff in each student's IEP so that parents may identify individuals with whom they can discuss their child's progress toward meeting the outcomes.

Reconceptualize the IEP; make IEPs broader documents encompassing student objectives for regular education as well as special education.

Procedural Safeguards:

Establish procedures so that the principal and the school staff, not solely special educators, will be responsible for documenting compliance with students' IEPs, regardless of where the service is delivered or by whom. Special educators must provide some of the leadership to achieve this.

Instruct a staff person in each school building or in each teacher team about special administrative tasks and procedures necessary to ensure compliance with procedural safeguards as responsibilities are shifted to the school level.

Have district office staff monitor to assure procedural safeguards are being met; the principal will be responsible for correcting any deficiencies found with assistance from the district office as needed.

Notify parents that accountability for their child's outcomes will be centered at the school; provide them with information on how to advocate for their children at the school.

Results/Use of Information:

Assist the accountable party in determining how to use results of the accountability system to foster change in instructional practice.

Facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in assessments by making the accountable parties responsible for students even if they are excluded from participation; for example, when calculating average scores, count students in the denominator even though there are no assessment scores to be included in the numerator.

Report results along with the context of students' educational experience; for example, report results according to the types of courses the students are taking.

Before imposing consequences on the accountable parties, conduct a one-year pilot of the school-based accountability system.

Implications

Ongoing staff development will be needed so that all stakeholders understand their specific role in the accountability system.

Administrative conflicts and barriers to improving education for all children will be lessened as school personnel begin to work together toward common goals.

Inappropriate referrals to special education may decrease as school personnel accept responsibility for all students.

Inclusion of students with disabilities into regular education will be facilitated.

A shared language will develop between regular and special educators, providing a common framework for collaboration, team teaching, and integration of students with disabilities into regular education. Teachers will be known for their particular expertise rather than as special or regular educators.

Ownership of all students, including students with disabilities, is promoted.

The individual autonomy and isolation of special education teachers is reduced, since they will be working side by side with other school personnel in a team effort to improve student outcomes. However, special education teachers may view these changes as contrary to their personal goals or as putting their jobs in jeopardy.

As schools assume responsibility for outcomes, the roles of district office staff will change, which may result in tension and confusion among staff and parents.

Superintendent and other administrative leadership will be required to ensure a successful transition to school-based accountability.

Centralized accountability for special education programs will be reduced. The locus of advocacy will shift. Parents will need to learn to advocate for their children at the local school building.

Centralized data management will need to expand to accommodate diverse situations in many different schools.

The relationship between the district administration and schools will change, especially for special education. Special education directors will have to give up control of funds to sites and principals and focus on compliance support. Technical assistance will be their primary role.

Special educators will need to relinquish notions that they have sole responsibility for the students they serve.

Option: District- and School-based Accountable Parties

Under this option, schools are accountable for the outcomes of some students with disabilities, but not all students. In one scenario, special education administrators in the district office are accountable for some or all students with disabilities, and regular educators in schools are responsible for other students. Alternatively, school-level special educators are responsible for students with disabilities and school-level regular educators are responsible for regular education students. Specific decision rules will need to be created to assign accountable parties when students spend time in both special and regular education.

This option would not necessarily require significant changes in how special education services have traditionally been delivered or in the responsibilities of special and regular educators. However, special educators could become responsible for outcomes previously in the domain of regular education. Similarly, regular educators could become responsible for outcomes previously in the domain of special education if school personnel are made accountable for students with disabilities who spend most of their time in regular education.

Assumptions

Individuals trained to work with special groups of students should be accountable for those students; other staff may not have the knowledge and skills necessary to use the results of the assessment system to improve educational practice as needed.

Special education administrators need to control the resources necessary to improve education for students with disabilities to assure they receive appropriate services and are not excluded from the outcomes-based accountability system.

There will be consequences for the accountable parties (such as rewards and/or sanctions) resulting from student performance on the agreed-upon outcomes.

Strategies to Consider

Establish the Accountable Parties:

Create a representative task force of special and regular educators to designate those students with disabilities who will be the responsibility of the school and those who will be the responsibility of the district special education administration.

To avoid potential conflicts on a student by student basis, develop specific criteria for establishing the accountable party. For example, if a student's curriculum is part academic and part functional, who will the accountable party be?

Assign accountability for students with significant disabilities to the district special education administration.

Assign accountable parties based on the proportion of time students spend in regular and special education; that is, assign responsibility to the program that provides the majority of services to the student.

Governance/Administration:

Clearly distinguish the decision-making roles of the district office and schools regarding all students with disabilities.

Have district office staff supervise special education instructional staff and provide separate staff development on the basis of different service goals.

Procedural Safeguards:

Ensure that the district special education administration remains responsible for procedural safeguards for students who are not the responsibility of the school.

Ensure that school personnel will become responsible for assuring IEP services are delivered to students who are the responsibility of the school. Instruct a staff person in each school building or in each teacher team about special administrative tasks and procedures necessary to ensure compliance with procedural safeguards.

Notify parents whether accountability for their child's outcomes will be centered at the school or at the district office.

Have district office staff monitor to assure procedural safeguards are being met by school staff.

Strategies to Consider (cont.)

IEPs:

Maintain current procedures for developing IEPs and include the accountable party in IEP development.

Specify the accountable party in IEPs so that parents may identify individuals with whom they can discuss their childrens' outcomes.

Results/Use of Information:

Separately report outcomes for students who are the responsibility of the district administration; reports for the entire district may need to be produced if there is a small number of these students in each school.

Communicate assessment results to instructional staff along with suggested changes in services, regardless of the designated accountable party.

Report the assessment results along with the characteristics of the students' learning experience; for example, report results according to the types of courses being taken by the students.

Implications

Trained special educators will have the primary responsibility for students with disabilities.

The locus of advocacy for some students with disabilities will shift from the district administrative office to the school.

Duplication of effort, possible inefficient use of resources, fragmentation, and increased strain on the school organization may occur.

Some students with disabilities may be overlooked by regular education school staff not responsible for their outcomes.

Special education staff will be less inclined to become active participants in school governance to benefit all students.

The coordination of procedural compliance and outcomes-based accountability may be facilitated.

If most students with disabilities remain the responsibility of the district, few changes will be needed in how special education services are delivered, and few changes would occur in the responsibilities of special and regular educators.

Some students with disabilities may be discouraged from participating in regular education courses, curricula, and assessments.

Conflicts over available resources may be reinforced between regular and special education.

Some parents may resist a system in which schools are not accountable for their children when this is the case for nondisabled students.

Conflicts may occur on a child-by-child basis as to who is responsible for each child's outcomes.

Program accountability is reinforced, while coordination among student services in diminished.

A wider variety of services may be available to students from the district than from individual schools.

Conflicts may occur between the district office and schools attempting to implement site-based management.

PUTTING OUTCOMES-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY INTO PRACTICE

How a new approach is put into place is as critical to its success as the approach itself. A good deal of general guidance is available to those seeking to make lasting education reforms in schools; all of that guidance applies to implementing the options contained in this guide. Even so, some district and school officials may see an outcomes-based accountability system that addresses all students as such a major shift in how schools operate that they may be reluctant to begin. Moving to an accountability system that includes students with disabilities will require careful attention to some specific steps for effectively changing traditional school district practice in special education.

Getting Outcomes-Based Accountability Up and Running

- Obtain support from the school board, superintendent, and school-level governance groups in developing the inclusive outcomes-based accountability system. If district-level and school-level mission statements and goals are in place, use them as the backdrop for the accountability system. At the onset of planning the system, involve a mix of staff who have classroom expertise in special education as well as regular education. If planning is already underway, expand the group to include both types of staff. In addition, bring the views and concerns of parents of students with disabilities as well as those of other parents into the planning process. The accountability system will be weakened if children with disabilities appear to be an afterthought.
- Work with some schools or a designated area of a district as a pilot project to show how an accountability system that includes students with disabilities works in practice. Pilot projects will also help to identify problems in the design and provide time to overcome technical, legal, and resource constraints.
- Develop a strategic action plan including who will do what, when, and the anticipated results. Commit to a reasonable schedule that sets a date when an accountability system focused on outcomes will cover all staff and students in the district. Abide by this schedule as closely as possible. Recognize that total consensus on outcomes and standards is unlikely and that day-to-day pressures will often lead staff to ask for postponement.
- Provide for staff whose role is to serve as a visible, central contact point in the district for parents of students with disabilities and advocacy groups. These staff will answer questions about how outcomes-based accountability will affect due process and other procedural safeguards for students and will help involve appropriate school or district officials.

"Collaboration must exist ... , regardless of the options selected."

Local district administrator

Making the Accountability System Function as Intended

- Establish ongoing training and assistance to equip school staff with appropriate skills and resources to implement the components of the accountability system. One-time training will not be sufficient. Planning time and inservice training will need to occur at regular intervals.
- Develop a computerized tracking system that can accommodate alternative assessment coding systems to augment standardized test data. Longitudinal tracking and monitoring capabilities will help to reduce the human resource requirements to sustain an effective system. Recognize that priorities must be established regarding the data elements that can reasonably be collected. A system which collects too much data may be unwieldy, and thus not provide useful or meaningful information for improvements in instructional practice.
- Regularly educate parents, the school board, and the public about the system, its implementation, how to interpret outcomes for students with disabilities, and when to expect to see results from the outcomes-based accountability system. If initial results look disappointing, strong pressures can emerge to "shoot the messenger" and throw out the measures producing those results. Worse yet, pressures may mount to exclude students, who because of their disabilities, may be thought to depress overall scores of a classroom or school. Be prepared to demonstrate how poor results will be addressed (e.g., through more training).
- At appropriate intervals, evaluate whether the accountability system is accomplishing the desired results or is producing unintended consequences. Evaluations must examine these questions for all students as well as for students with disabilities. An accountability system can unintentionally have different impacts on different types of students. The findings of these evaluations can be used to revise the system and the way in which it is being implemented.
- Uncover ways to work with state-mandated assessment systems through incorporating usable parts of these systems and seeking waivers for redundancies or requirements that conflict. Officials in some states have pursued a flexible approach that allows room for localities to work within an overall framework of accountability for outcomes.

The
Mystery
of
Stonehenge

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Outcomes Series and Companion Documents

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Educational Outcomes and Indicators for Early Childhood (Age 6)
Educational Outcomes and Indicators for Students Completing School
Possible Sources of Data for School Completion Indicators
Educational Outcomes and Indicators for Individuals at the Post-School Level
Self-Study Guide to the Development of Educational Outcomes and Indicators
Developing a Model of Educational Outcomes
Consensus Building: A Process for Selecting Educational Outcomes and Indicators

State Reports

State Special Education Outcomes 1991
State Special Education Outcomes 1992
State Special Education Outcomes 1993

Technical Reports

1 - State Practices in the Assessment of Outcomes for Students with Disabilities
2 - Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in National and State Data Collection Systems
3 - Experts' Opinions on National Math Standards for Students with Disabilities
4 - Experts' Opinions About the Appropriateness and Feasibility of National Math Standards
5 - IEPs and Standards: What They Say for Students with Disabilities
6 - The Identification of People with Disabilities in National Data Bases
7 - Matching Information in National Data Collection Programs to School Completion Model
8 - Availability of Data on School Completion Outcomes and Indicators
9 - Matching State Goals to a Model of School Completion Outcomes and Indicators

Synthesis Reports

1 - Assessing Educational Outcomes: State Activity and Literature Integration
2 - Synthesis Report Update 1992: Policy Groups & Reports on Assessing Educational Outcomes
3 - Responses to Working Paper 1: Conceptual Model of Educational Outcomes
4 - Testing Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: A Review of the Literature
5 - Can "All" Ever Really Mean "All" in Defining and Assessing Student Outcomes?
6 - Implications of Outcomes-Based Education for Children with Disabilities
7 - Views on Inclusion and Testing Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
8 - Synthesis Report Update 1993: Recent Activities in National Goals, Standards, and Tests
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7 - Promoting Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools
8 - Standards and Students with Disabilities: Reality or Virtual Reality?
9 - Accommodating Students with Disabilities in National and State Testing Programs

Working Papers

1 - Conceptual Model of Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth with Disabilities
2 - An Evolving Conceptual Model of Educational Outcomes for Children and Youth
3 - Outcomes for Children and Youth with Disabilities: Secondary Analysis of National Data

These documents may be ordered from:

NCEO Publications Office
350 Elliott Hall
75 East River Road
Minneapolis, MN 55455

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